Washington, DC - Working to increase the supply of clean drinking water for Southern California, Congresswoman Linda Sánchez (CA-39) today secured $600,000 to fund a study of the Los Angeles Basin Watershed. The study is designed to explore ways to capture rain water runoff in L.A. and Orange Counties to increase the supply of clean drinking water, reduce ocean pollution, and improve neighborhoods, mini-parks, and habitat areas.

The funding was included in the Energy and Water Appropriations bill which passed the full Appropriations Committee today, and is expected to be passed by the U.S. House of Representatives shortly.

“Currently, millions of gallons of fresh rainwater are wasted every year in the Los Angeles area when the rain runs off streets and parking lots, down storm drains, and ultimately ends up in the Pacific Ocean. This is water that cannot be used by our families for drinking and cooking,” said Congresswoman Linda Sánchez.

Further complicating the problem is that LA County’s population is expected to grow by 2 million people by 2020, creating an even greater demand for fresh water.

“We must find new and innovative ways to create safe drinking water to address future needs. The L.A. County area loses one-third of our annual water to runoff. If storm water could be safely captured and naturally filtered into ground water, we reduce the level of water we import - at great cost - from the Colorado River and Northern California,” explained Sánchez.

“One way of addressing this problem is to safely divert, naturally filter, and recharge groundwater rather than sending it down storm channels to the ocean where the storm water often serves to contaminate local beaches,” said Sánchez.

“Over the past seventy-five years, surface runoff has increased tenfold because of urbanization and its resulting pavement. The study will look at ways to capture rainwater and prevent it from flowing into the rivers and oceans where it can contaminate local beaches. When water hits the ground it picks up litter, gasoline, and other pollutants that can create a health hazard for millions of Southern California residents and visitors, as well as damaging the aquatic habitat.

“By capturing runoff for infiltration, we are restoring some of the natural hydrology of the environment as well as keeping pollutants out of our waterways,” explained Suzanne Dallman, who is managing the research study for the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council. “We will also be assessing conditions where it is safe to infiltrate without risk of groundwater contamination, and quantifying the potential for runoff infiltration as an additional water supply,” Dallman concluded.

In addition to the monitoring currently underway, the study will implement several neighborhood projects to demonstrate a variety of creative management techniques, use runoff for irrigation and groundwater recharge, enhance open space, promote water conservation, and managing flooding.

“Finally, local neighborhoods could benefit from capturing and reusing water because green

spaces and parks are likely to be enhanced as part of the design. For example, the City of Long Beach would like to install a groundwater recapture project at a Long Beach park. This will help reduce the amount of storm water running off from the parking lots into the adjacent river and local beaches," said Sánchez.

The state has already allocated the funding for additional demonstration sites such as the Long Beach Park and the City Council is expected to review the proposal this month.

"I am thrilled to have been able to secure funding for this study. It allows us to explore new options for ensuring that our families have access to enough safe drinking water. At the same time, we will get the benefit of cleaning up our beaches and creating more green spaces," concluded Sánchez.

The Los Angeles Basin Water Supply Augmentation Study is being implemented by the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council, with funding and oversight from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation under its Southern California Investigations Program.